

JUDGING OTHERS

"He who sees others' faults, and is ever irritable,
- the corruptions of such a one grow. He is far
from the destruction of corruptions."

Dhammapada, v 253

We read that the Buddha uttered this verse concerning a monk who was always seeking others' faults. We all have a tendency to be judgmental and a tendency to attribute motives or reasons to people's ideas or behaviour when in fact we can't know what the other people's intentions or mental states always are. For example, we were discussing a person who might eat a lot. From the situation we cannot necessarily assume that he or she has more attachment to food than the person who eats very little. Judging others is a condition to turn away from people and not to want to associate with them. It's a condition for aversion and indicates a lack of awareness of the realities of the present moment at that time. We could suggest that it's an 'anti-social' trait and it indicates a lack of mettā or loving-kindness or consideration for others at those times. In one of our discussions, we considered how it's not useful, how it's destructive to be concerned about or 'caught up' in the wholesomeness or otherwise of other people's behaviour.

Someone mentioned in the discussion, that he was noticing more and more the unskillful aspect of others' conduct. This was making him more 'restrained' in his own conduct. As an example, he told us that he had been watching 'idiotic' behaviour on T.V. While others appeared to be lost in the humour of the situation, he was perceiving it as just a foolish object and tended to be more reserved and quiet in his daily behaviour. We asked him 'if this meant there was some change in his personality or way of living and he agreed that there was. We pointed out the danger of a subtle attempt to 'control', trying to have more wholesomeness by trying to maintain a more equal demeanour. This is not the development of wholesomeness or wisdom as taught by the Buddha. At these times one becomes withdrawn and has aversion, sometimes without realising it, to those one is thinking about or judging. If one has an idea of trying to change one's personality in some way at these times, it indicated a strong idea of self at such time trying to be this or that way. It's not 'natural' behaviour or wholesomeness of any kind.

It seems to be a common experience that when we have heard a little but not enough of the Buddha's teachings, that we think we should begin to maintain some equilibrium or even-temperedness. This is not the understanding of oneself or understanding of one's tendencies or the other realities which appear through the senses and the mind in our daily life. It indicates only that we are trying to be something different from what we are, rather than accepting with awareness the realities which are conditioned which make up what we take for ourselves. As one begins to understand more the difference between wholesomeness and unwholesomeness and the different kinds of reality, one becomes more aware, or awareness becomes more aware, of the strong clinging to self having this or that kind of nature.

The Buddha taught us that we are all susceptible to the eight worldly conditions. Two of the worldly conditions that we are very influenced by are praise and blame. We mind a lot about whether we are considered worthy, whether we hear nice words and the contrary. In another verse from the Dhammapada, we read:

"This, O Atula, is an old saying; it is not one of today only: they blame those who sit silent, they blame those who speak too much. Those speaking little too they blame. There is no one who is not blamed in this world."

Dhammapada, v 227

In one Sutta, The Buddha ^{is} describing the qualities one can always blame and indicates that even the 'perfect One' can be criticised. He may not have any faults but we still may not like the way he walks or the tone of his voice, for example. In another Sutta (Bk of the Sixes, Anguttara Nikaya, v.44), Migasālā comes to see Ānanda. She explains that the Buddha said that both her father, Purāna, and her uncle, Isidatta reached the same level of enlightenment. She cannot understand it because she says her father lived 'the godly life, dwelling apart, abstaining from common, carnal things', Isidatta, on the other hand 'did not live the godly life but rejoiced with a wife'. When Ānanda repeats the conversation to the Buddha, ^{the Buddha} explains their different characters, their different strengths and weaknesses to show that 'herein Isidatta fares not Purāna's way but another's.' He also urges Ānanda not to be a 'measurer of persons; measure not the measure of persons; verily, Ānanda, he digs a pit for himself who measures the measure of persons. I alone, Ānanda, can measure their measure - or one like me.' In this Sutta the Buddha also gives examples of two people who might be of similar nature and judged equally by the 'measurer of persons'. In fact there may be conditions for one of those judged to hear and understand the Teachings and who after death 'fares to excellence'. He explains again that the harm is to the 'measurer'.

When we were in Bangkok, I was reminded how there can be a strong element of conceit involved when we make judgments. I was comparing and judging one group of people with another and feeling dissatisfied that I was not with those I considered more as my friends. It can help a lot at such times to realise that ^{are} other peoples' states of mind and behaviour ^{are} conditioned and ^{are} changing all the time. It can help us to be more tolerant to others as most of us are motivated by unwholesomeness most of the time. Only the arahat or fully enlightened being has no more conceit. For the rest of us, we can begin to know more and more about the subtle as well as gross degrees of comparison, when we have an idea for even an instant that we are better, equal or worse than others in some way. Sometimes we might feel let down by inconsistencies in others' behaviour or we may have a wonderful image of someone that is crushed. If we understand more about the different conditioned realities again, there will be less conditions for surprise or shock. We will realise that while we are not enlightened, our deep-rooted tendencies make us capable of almost any deed through body, speech or mind. This is the way that we can be more understanding and sympathetic towards others and ourselves, without trying to change our nature to how we think it should be.